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## A message from our President and CEO Todd A. Herman, PhD

Dear Mint community,

The Black Lives Matter movement, re-ignited by the death of George Floyd on May 25, continues to shine a glaring light on the racism, racial inequity, and systemic barriers that Black Americans have known and recognized for centuries. As the movement has gained strength and broad support, even internationally, white Americans have had no choice but to remove the blinders and recognize the systemic discrimination that still exists in our society and institutional structures. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted inequities, making the disconnect between where we thought we were and where we are obvious—and unacceptable.

As the president and CEO of the Mint, as well as an individual, I am grateful that the Black Lives Matter movement has inspired so many, including me, to re-evaluate our words, actions, and what we thought we knew about our own country and community. I am thankful that our BIPOC friends and colleagues have shared histories I was unaware of, and I'm also troubled that my education glossed over, marginalized, or misrepresented so much of America's history. This is an opportunity for all of us to learn more, acknowledge our mistakes, work to understand the perspectives and experiences of others, and to call-out racist actions when we see them. For the last two months, the Mint staff has been compiling an extensive, but by no means exhaustive, list of resources we've been reading, listening to, and watching to better educate ourselves on issues of race, racism, and inequality. [We have posted a key sampling of this list on our website](#) in hopes that the resources may also be of benefit to members of our Mint community as we join on this journey together. The list is divided into categories, such as books, podcasts, movies and resources for raising anti-racist children. (For the full list, [visit the Mint wiki page](#), which will be updated regularly.)

Shortly after George Floyd's death, I wrote a statement that focused on support for fighting racial injustice and the role that museums and artists can play in helping support dialogue. What I did not address was the way the Mint's own past hasn't lived up to these ideals. Sadly, The Mint has not always been the welcoming and inclusive institution we aspire to be today. More than half a century ago—but still in living memory—African-Americans were only permitted to enter the museum on one designated day a week. Unfortunately, this type of exclusionary practice was not unique to the Mint, to Charlotte, or even to the South, and these policies fostered and reinforced discriminatory social and

cultural hierarchies. These hierarchies extend to the Mint's permanent collection itself. Many art museums share a history of building collections through the lens of a white-male-European focus, alongside trophies of Colonialism, all in the name of education. But we must ask ourselves, what is the lesson we are teaching—and for whom? The Mint Museum's staff recognizes these inequities and the damaging messages they send that undermine our values of inclusion through diverse voices and perspectives. We acknowledge that these past practices have made many feel not just unrecognized in our galleries but also unwelcome, unwanted.

The Mint has come a long way since the days of Jim Crow, but we also understand that we have not progressed far enough. What are we doing to answer the call? Allow me to share with you a few of our ongoing initiatives:

- A year ago, we created a Diversity and Inclusion team that, in addition to developing and organizing workshops and staff retreats on diversity, bias, and inclusion, has developed a roadmap to address and combat implicit bias and inequity in our programs and workplace that will be integral to our upcoming strategic plan.
- We continue our focus on expanding the Mint's collection by acquiring work by female, black, LGBTQ, Latinx and other traditionally marginalized artists to represent a more inclusive look at our shared creative history, while also reevaluating the narratives and perspectives told through our permanent collection. In 2020 alone, of the 19 contemporary works we acquired, more than half are by women artists, and half are by BIPOC and LGBTQ artists.
- We are proud of our longstanding diverse programs, such as Mint to Move Cultural Dance Night, Mint Música & Poesía Café, Bilingual Storytime, and the Grier Heights Community Youth Arts Program, now in its 17th year. And we've welcomed hundreds of people to our many Community Conversations addressing race and inequality, such as "Requiem for Mother Emanuel," "Selma: A 50 Year Remembrance," and "A Contemporary Look at the Black Male Image," generated through our Community Relations and Curatorial teams.
- Our commitment to diversity and inclusion extends to the local arts community: You can witness the extraordinary work of the local mural artist known as Owl, a native of Colombia, South America, on the walls of our *Classic Black: The Basalt Sculpture of Wedgwood & His Contemporaries* exhibition at Mint Museum Randolph, and expect to see the work of de'Angelo Dia, Georgie Nakima/Garden of Journey, and MyLoan Dinh in our upcoming *Constellation CLT* installations. Antoine Williams and Stacy Lynn Waddell are two of the three artists commissioned to make work for the forthcoming April 2021 exhibition *Silent Streets*, a survey of the powerful work coming out of the artist collectives Goodyear Arts and BLK MRKT. And the work of Julio Gonzales is at the center of an artist intervention within our Art of the Ancient Americas galleries at Mint Museum Randolph—on view once we are able to re-open to the public.

But we realize that this is only a portion of the work we need to be doing to combat inequity in the museum. We must also work to increase the presence of BIPOC at the table both internally and at the board level. Although 50 percent of our Board Executive Committee is BIPOC, that does not hold true for the board of trustees as a whole, and we know we can do better. In staffing, we are currently investigating ways in which the Mint can play an active role in increasing the number of BIPOC in traditionally under-represented areas such as curatorial, collections management, and arts education through mentoring and paid internships/fellowships.

The Mint Museum has been part of this community for more than 80 years and we are committed to being part of the change that helps to build empathy, equity, and understanding through the arts. We thank you for joining us on this journey.



Todd A. Herman, PhD  
President and CEO of The Mint Museum

